

Message Text

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ACTION SS-25

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 SSO-00 /026 W
-----069192 101327Z /50
P 101226Z APR 78
FM AMEMBASSY MOSCOW
TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 0211

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 MOSCOW 07232

EXDIS

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PARM, UR, US
SUBJECT: U.S.-SOVIET TALKS ON CONVENTIONAL ARMS TRANSFERS

REF: (A) STATE 80818, (B) MOSCOW 6771

1. THE EMBASSY HAS THE FOLLOWING COMMENTS AND VIEWS ON THE COMING CAT TALKS SET FOR HELINKI MAY 4. OUR OBSERVATIONS OF LAST DECEMBER ON THE SOVIET APPROACH IN THE FIRST ROUND SEEM IN GENERAL TO REMAIN VALID FOR HELSINKI. WE CONTINUE TO THINK THAT THE CAUTIOUS AND CONSERVATIVE APPROACH OF THE SOVIETS WILL REMAIN UNCHANGED.

2. THE EVIDENCE SEEMS TO INDICATE THAT THE SOVIETS CONSIDER THE CURRENT STAGE OF THE EALKS TO BE ONLY EXPLORATORY. TO UNDERLINE THIS THEY HAVE POINTEDLY SUGGESTED THAT THE TALKS BE REFERRED TO AS CONSULTATIONS AND NOT "WORKING GROUP" DISCUSSIONS. (MENDELEVICH ON APRIL 4 ALSO QUESTIONED THE USE OF THE TERM "WORKING GROUP" FOR THE CAT TALKS.) FURTHERMORE, THE THRUST OF MENDELEVICH'S REMARKS ON APRIL 4 SHOWED THAT THE SOVIETS STILL HAVE DOUBTS THAT U.S.-SOVIET COOPERATION ON CAT CAN BE FRUITFUL. HE CLAIMED THAT A FINAL DECISION TO CONTINUE WITH THE TALKS CANNOT BE MADE UNTIL AFTER THE CONCLUSION OF THE NEXT ROUND. WE WOULD ESTIMATE, THEREFORE, THAT
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ALTHOUGH THE SOVIETS WILL, AS MENDELEVICH INDICATED, TAKE THE LEAD IN HELSINKI, THEY WILL NOT GO SO FAR AS TO ELABORATE A SERIES OF SPECIFIC PROPOSALS.

3. KHESTOV'S FEW SUBSTANTIVE COMMENTS IN DECEMBER AND MENDELEVICH'S REMARKS INDICATE THAT THEY WILL INSTEAD PRESS HARD ON THE QUESTION OF THOSE POLITICAL PRINCIPLES

WHICH OUGHT, IN THEIR VIEW, TO GOVERN THE TRANSFER OF ARMS. IN THIS RESPECT WE SEE THE "LEGAL" APPROACH OF KHLESTOV AS CONTINUING WITH MENDELEVICH. HE WILL LIKELY ARGUE THAT THE "PRINCIPLES" ARE PARAMOUNT AND THAT THEY MUST BE TREATED BEFORE DECIDING WHETHER AND HOW TO CONTROL TRANSFERS. WHILE THIS IS VERY THIN GRUEL FOR THE COMING SESSION, MENDELEVICH IS CAPABLE OF SPREADING IT OVER THE FOUR DAYS OF TALKS WITH QUESTIONS AND COMMENTS ON THE U.S. APPROACH COMPLETING HIS CONTRIBUTION TO THE SESSION. CLEARLY THE SOVIETS ARE NOT IN A GREAT HURRY TO MAKE PROGRESS, ALTHOUGH THEY WILL MAKE EVERY EFFORT TO AVOID APPEARING TO BE THE BRAKE ON THE TALKS.

4. ALTHOUGH THE CHANGE TO MENDELEVICH FROM KHLESTOV WILL CERTAINLY RESULT IN SOME MINOR CHANGES IN STYLE AND SUBSTANCE, WE DO NOT THINK THAT THE BASIC APPROACH WILL BE GREATLY AFFECTED IN THIS COMING ROUND. MENDELEVICH'S DESIGNATION IS PROBABLY THE RESULT OF A COMBINATION OF FACTORS. FIRST, THE LOS SESSION HAS JUST BEGUN IN GENEVA AND COULD BE CRUCIAL TO THE SUCCESS OF A LOS AGREEMENT. KHLESTOV HAS BEEN A SENIOR SOVIET PARTICIPANT IN THE LOS PROCESS SINCE ITS INCEPTION. HE HEADED PREVIOUS SOVIET LOS DELEGATIONS AND AS AN MFA DEPARTMENT CHIEF HE HAS CHIEF RESPONSIBILITY FOR BACKSTOPPING THE CURRENT ROUND. THUS, SUBSTANTIVELY AND CONFIDENTIAL

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BUREAUCRATICALLY HIS PARTICIPATION IN THE CAT TALKS AT THIS TIME MAY BE DIFFICULT.

5. MENDELEVICH, ON THE OTHER HAND, HAS NO LINE RESPONSIBILITIES WITHIN MFA AND HIS ONLY OTHER RESPONSIBILITY, THE INDIAN OCEAN TALKS, ARE NOT SO PRESSING AS TO OCCUPY HIM FULL TIME. FINALLY, MFA USA DEPARTMENT FIRST SECRETARY KUZNETSOV TOLD US THAT THE SOVIET SIDE DOES NOT CONSIDER THAT THE CAT TALKS HAVE REACHED THE POINT WHERE THE TREATY AND LEGAL EXPERTISE WHICH KHLESTOV HAS CAN BE FULLY UTILIZED. THIS IS ANOTHER WAY OF SAYING THAT THE TALKS ARE TOO PRELIMINARY TO WARRANT HIS TAKING TIME FROM HIS OTHER DUTIES TO DEVOTE ATTENTION TO CAT. WHETHER KHLESTOV WILL RETURN TO CAT AT A LATER STAGE IS A QUESTION, ALTHOUGH MENDELEVICH WOULD HAVE US BELIEVE HE WILL NOT, SINCE ON APRIL 4 HE CHARACTERIZED HIS DUTIES IN CAT AS "PERMANENT."

6. MENDELEVICH HAS VIRTUALLY ASSURED US THAT HE WILL CONTINUE TO PRESS THE "LEGAL" ARGUMENTATION WHICH KHLESTOV BEGAN LAST DECEMBER. FROM THE SOVIET POINT OF VIEW SUCH AN APPROACH IS MOST ADVANTAGEOUS BECAUSE IT FOCUSES ATTENTION ON THE QUESTION OF "WHO" HAS A

"LEGITIMATE" NEED FOR ARMS AND NOT "WHAT" ARMS SHOULD OR SHOULD NOT BE SUPPLIED. KHLESTOV'S REFERENCE TO "PRINCIPLES" IN DECEMBER CLEARLY INDICATED THAT THE "RACIST" AND "AGGRESSOR" STATES SHOULD NOT BE "LEGAL" RECIPIENTS AND THAT STATES EXERCISING "LEGITIMATE SELF-DEFENSE" AND NATIONAL LIBERATION MOVEMENTS SHOULD BE. BEFORE MOVING ON TO THE QUESTION OF "WHAT" SHOULD BE SUPPLIED TO THESE LATTER (I.E., THE "TECHNICAL"

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ACTION SS-25

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 SSO-00 /026 W
-----069285 101328Z /50
P 101226Z APR 78
FM AMEMBASSY MOSCOW
TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 0212

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ISSUE IN THE WORDS OF MENDELEVICH), THE SOVIETS WILL WISH TO CALL INTO QUESTION THE LEGITIMACY OF TRANSFERS TO THE FORMER.

7. IT IS IN THIS AREA THAT THE SOVIETS WILL LIKELY HAVE THEIR SHARPEST CRITICISM (POLEMICS ARE NOT MENDELEVICH'S STYLE) OF THE U.S. FOR WHAT MENDELEVICH REFERRED TO ON APRIL 4 AS "UNDESIRABLE TRANSFERS." ISRAEL ("AGGRESSOR"), SOUTH AFRICA ("RACIST"), IRAN AND SAUDI ARABIA ("ARMS IN EXCESS OF SELF-DEFENSE NEEDS") ARE SOME OF THE "BAD" EXAMPLES OF U.S. ARMS TRANSFERS WHICH ARE LIKELY TO BE SINGLED OUT. (THE USE OF U.S. SUPPLIED ARMS IN LEBANON BY ISRAEL RECENTLY WILL BE PARTICULARLY ATTRACTIVE TO THEM AS A CASE IN POINT.)

8. HOWEVER, KHLESTOV SEEMED TO INDICATE IN DECEMBER THAT A REGIONAL APPROACH TO ARMS TRANSFERS WAS NOT A PROPER TOPIC FOR THE DISCUSSIONS. INSTEAD HE THOUGHT THE "MAIN TOPIC" WAS THE QUESTION OF A "GENERAL LIMITATION OF THE INTERNATIONAL ARMS TRADE." SINCE THE LOGIC OF THE SOVIET POSITION ARGUES THAT THE REGIONAL PROBLEMS ARE ONLY THE REFLECTION OF THE GLOBAL "PRINCIPLES," WE THINK THAT THEY WILL TRY TO STAY

AWAY FROM A DISCUSSION OF REGIONAL ARMS TRANSFER
RESTRAINT IN FAVOR OF A MORE GENERAL DISCUSSION OF
UNIVERSALLY APPLICABLE "PRINCIPLES."
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9. ON WHAT MENDELEVICH DESCRIBED AS THE "TECHNICAL" LEVEL, IT APPEARS FROM WHAT HE SAID THAT THE SOVIETS WILL NOT MAKE A POINT OF DIFFERENCES WITH THE SUGGESTED APPROACHES WHICH THE U.S. SIDE OUTLINED IN THE DECEMBER ROUND. RATHER, MENDELEVICH SAID HE WOULD HAVE "QUESTIONS" ABOUT THESE APPROACHES. THE SOVIET TACTIC MIGHT BE TO CLAIM THAT SINCE THESE ARE "TECHNICAL" DETAILS, THEY DESERVE ADDITIONAL EXPOSITION, NOT DEBATE, AT THIS STAGE OF THE DISCUSSIONS. SUCH A POSTURE, COMBINED WITH A SOVIET STATEMENT THAT THEY AGREE IN PRINCIPLE THAT THESE U.S. SUGGESTIONS ARE ACCEPTABLE -- ALTHOUGH NOT ALL INCLUSIVE -- WOULD ASSIST THE SOVIETS IN FOCUSING THE DISCUSSION ON THE "POLITICAL, LEGAL" ISSUES AS THEY SEE THEM.

10. IN SUM, WE FORESEE A RATHER DESULTORY ROUND OF TALKS, NOT DISSIMILAR TO THE DECEMBER SESSION WITH THE DIFFERENCE THAT IN THIS ONE THE SOVIET SIDE WILL BE A MORE ACTIVE PARTICIPANT. TOON

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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: Z
Capture Date: 01 jan 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: ARMS, NEGOTIATIONS, SALT (ARMS CONTROL), ARMS SHIPMENTS
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 10 apr 1978
Decaption Date: 20 Mar 2014
Decaption Note: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 20 Mar 2014
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1978MOSCOW07232
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: GS
Errors: N/A
Expiration:
Film Number: D780153-1117
Format: TEL
From: MOSCOW
Handling Restrictions:
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1978/newtext/t19780472/aaaacjnk.tel
Line Count: 199
Litigation Code IDs:
Litigation Codes:
Litigation History:
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Message ID: 345720b3-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Office: ACTION SS
Original Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Original Handling Restrictions: ONLY
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 4
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Previous Handling Restrictions: ONLY
Reference: 78 STATE 80818, 78 MOSCOW 6771
Retention: 0
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 16 may 2005
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review Media Identifier:
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
SAS ID: 3015992
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: U.S.-SOVIET TALKS ON CONVENTIONAL ARMS TRANSFERS
TAGS: PARM, PCAT, UR, US
To: STATE
Type: TE
vdkgvwkey: odbc://SAS/SAS.dbo.SAS_Docs/345720b3-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Review Markings:
Sheryl P. Walter
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
20 Mar 2014
Markings: Sheryl P. Walter Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 20 Mar 2014